

The University of Chicago

A COMPARISON OF THE PHILOSOPHY AND
TACTICS OF THE INDEPENDENT LABOR
PARTY WITH THOSE OF THE LABOR
PARTY IN ENGLAND, 1924-1931

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE
SOCIAL SCIENCES IN CANDIDACY FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

1936

By

CAIRNS KING SMITH

Private Edition, Distributed by
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARIES
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

1941

The University of Chicago

A COMPARISON OF THE PHILOSOPHY AND
TACTICS OF THE INDEPENDENT LABOR
PARTY WITH THOSE OF THE LABOR
PARTY IN ENGLAND, 1924-1931

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE
SOCIAL SCIENCES IN CANDIDACY FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
1936

By
CAIRNS KING SMITH

Private Edition, Distributed by
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARIES
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
1941



CHAPTER III
THE CONFLICT OF THEORY AND TACTIC

The Party Struggle

The Labor Party conference in 1918 created a new situation in the relations of the two Labor Parties. As stated previously, that conference widened the basis of membership in the Labor Party so that all workers by "hand or by brain" would be eligible. Formerly, membership had been possible for individuals only through membership in an affiliated organization. The new development was to place the I.L.P., in a somewhat dubious position. Thanks however to the organizing ability of Arthur Henderson and the desire of the leaders in both groups to co-operate, at least a working basis of unity was achieved. Fundamental differences remained, however, awaiting only certain decisive events to bring them to the surface.

What the Labor Party had done to its constitution in 1918, the I.L.P. did in 1922. At the Nottingham conference in that year the party made a thorough revision of the constitution and defined its object as the furtherance of "the Socialist objective within the political trade union and co-operative sections of the wider Labor Movement."¹

In view of the subsequent relations of the parties, this turn to the left is important as indicative of the trend within the Labor movement towards what is known as "left wingism." Its origin may be attributed, in part at least, to the general social upheaval which has arisen out of the war and to the Russian Revolu-

¹New Leader, April 22, 1927.

tion. It is probably best illustrated by the pacifist activities of the I.L.P. of the war years and by the shop steward movement of the same period. The latter arose out of the failure of the trade unions to give adequate protection to their members in the constant disputes between workers and employers.

The shop steward movement had its beginning on the Clyde during the engineering strike of February 1915, and it quickly spread throughout Great Britain. While the labor supply was limited and war needs imperative, it exercised a powerful influence in the industrial world. With the close of the war, however, the situation was quickly reversed and the movement rapidly declined. Its leaders either went over to the new Communist Party or continued their activities within the Labor Party and their former trade unions.

In the I.L.P. their influence has been particularly noticeable. There, David Kirkwood and other representatives of the shop steward movement joined forces with some of the more radical leaders in the I.L.P., as Maxton, Wheatley and Lansbury, to form the nucleus of what later became known as the "left wing movement." Nor was this leftist tendency confined alone to the I.L.P. By virtue of the close connection between the Independent Labor Party and the Labor Party, the latter was soon to feel its influence. In discussing the part played by this left wing group, the New Statesman, some years later, observed:

The present Left Wing pressure inside the Party is designed, not so much to change the official creed or programme, or to convert Labour from a constitutional to a revolutionary party, as to secure a more forward and militant spirit in dealing with emergencies as they arise. Stronger opposition in the House of Commons, closer and more sympathetic contact with the trade unions in important industrial movements--these emerge, through a cloud of phrases, as the real objects of the main body critical of the present leadership. . . . Its object is not to convert, but to influence and stimulate. The effect of this week's Conference of the Labour Party at Liverpool is to be measured, not by the formal decisions it has

taken, but by the stimulus it has applied. In this sense, and in this only, it is a move to the left.¹

The I.L.P. obviously desired therefore to bring about a wider acceptance of the principles of socialism. In 1923, the I.L.P. leaders were again in parliament as well as a strong contingent of followers. But despite this outward success, public opinion had already begun to regard the I.L.P. as only a minor group within the Labor Party, though the former increasingly disapproved of the larger organization's policy.² One critic states that, in the first months of 1923, he began to feel the clash between the opposing groups which he described as "the struggle of wills between those who wished to keep the party a fighting working-class party and those who had decided that Labor, if it was to attain to power, must become as like the other great parties as was humanly possible."³ For the I.L.P.:

The object was to prepare for submission to the Labour Movement, and for advocacy within it, practical schemes which would enable the next Labour Government to take steps to lift the people from their destitution and to lay the foundations of Socialism by placing the key industries and services within the hands of the community. These proposals gave definite form to the pioneer Socialist function of the I.L.P. within the Labour Party.⁴

The coming to office of the first Labor government in 1924 tended to develop this divergence of viewpoint between the I.L.P. and the Labor Party. Both parties were agreed that a Labor government should be formed; the differences arose over the nature of the legislation to be introduced. To MacDonald assuming office meant an opportunity to alleviate some of the more serious

¹New Statesman, October, 1925, p. 686.

²New Leader, April 22, 1927.

³John Scanlon, Decline and Fall of the Labour Party (London: Peter Davies, 1932), p. 44.

⁴New Leader, April 22, 1927.

problems of the day; to the leaders of the I.L.P. it was an opportunity to introduce socialist measures.

On questions of foreign policy, Mac Donald was determined to bring about a more friendly relationship between the nations of Europe. In this effort, he met with considerable success, and enjoyed throughout his term of office the united support of the Labor Party. In the domestic field he made little progress. The housing program of John Wheatley, Minister of Health, was a notable exception. The most pressing problem facing the government was that of unemployment. Various methods were taken to better conditions but no improvement was experienced.

The supporters of MacDonald contended that as much was done as a minority government could do. The leaders of the I.L.P., on the other hand, took the position that so long as palliative measures only were introduced, failure would result. The remedy lay only in the introduction of socialist measures aiming to reorganize the social system. Such methods might mean a temporary defeat, but it would at least clarify the essential differences between the socialist parties and the middle class parties in the minds of the public.

By the end of the first Labor government in 1924, however, a new spirit of "moderation" seemed to have entered the Labor Party. Probably no event has revealed this development more clearly than the general strike of 1926. It is also significant in that it illustrates the basic differences existing between the right and left wings of the Labor Party.

The underlying cause of the strike was the serious situation in the coal mining industry. After the close of the war, British coal production had suffered a steady increase. In 1921, a serious crisis was only averted by the failure of the transport

workers and the railwaymen to support the miners in their demands for better terms. At the end of that year the industry became depressed. In 1924, the miners demanded and received a revision of the 1921 agreement in view of improved conditions. But the upswing in the industry was due largely to the occupation of the Ruhr. It was temporary only, and in 1925, the coalowners demanded a revision of the agreement of the previous year. The Miners' Federation refused to take cuts or work longer hours and a breakdown seemed imminent. The Baldwin government finally intervened and offered to subsidize the coalowners until May 1, 1926. No agreement between miners and operators was then arrived at, consequently the miners struck.

The crisis in the coal industry was the immediate cause of the general strike. Three aspects of the crisis in particular were responsible: first, a growing sympathy for the miners once further wage cuts were revealed as the intention of the coalowners; the crushing wage reductions suffered by the workers generally for the past six years; and finally, it was felt that wage cuts for the miners would mean similar cuts for millions of other workers.¹

The strike lasted only nine days. Differences between the Miners' Federation and the General Council of the Trades Union Congress had arisen early in the struggle. It was a protest against the proposal to cut wages, to increase the working hours, and to return to district agreements. The Industrial Committee of the General Council on April 30 upheld that position and called a general strike to support it. On May 12 the strike, which had never become complete, was called off. What was the reason?

J. H. Thomas, one of the most active figures in the

¹J. R. Clynes, "The Political Lessons of the Strike," Labour Magazine, July, 1926, p. 99.

series of negotiations, made it quite clear from the very first that he was not in sympathy with the method of the general strike. Only a few hours before the strike began, he stated in the house of commons:

I ask hon. members to picture the situation. . . . I know the Government's position, I have never disguised that in a challenge to the Constitution, God help us unless the Government won. But this is not only not a revolution. It is not something that says: "We want to overthrow everything." It is merely a plain economic industrial dispute where the workers say: "We want justice." We believe it may be - I do not disguise that in its results it may be - that these things may happen. I do not disguise that for a moment. That is the danger of it. That is always the difficulty of the situation.¹

Thomas left no doubt in the minds of those in the house of commons of his desire to avert the struggle, if at all possible. Obviously moved by the gravity of the situation, he exclaimed, "I ask this House whether it is still too late to avert what I believe is the greatest calamity for the country."²

Nor was Ramsay MacDonald, the leader of the Labor Party in the house of commons, to be outdone in his expression of loyalty to established institutions:

With the discussion of the General Strike and Bolshevism and all that kind of thing I have nothing to do at all. I respect the constitution as much as the right honourable gentleman, the member for Hillbead (Sir Robert Home).³

There was no mistaking the attitude of the leaders on the general strike. Philip Snowden was equally opposed. He saw a justification for a general strike in two circumstances only:

One is where the Government is entering into a war and quite obviously against the overwhelming wishes of the country. Possibly there might be some justification for a stoppage of work to coerce a Government which, again quite obviously, was seeking to pass through Parliament by the aid of a powerful majority some measure for which it had no mandate, or which it was perfectly clear that the overwhelming majority of the country were opposed to that measure. But why in these two circumstances might a general strike possibly be effective?

¹Parl. Deb., 5s, HC, Vol. 195, p. 81.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 114.

Exactly because it had the support of practically the whole country. I cannot possibly imagine that circumstances and conditions like these would ever be present in an industrial general strike.¹

The leaders of the strike, above all things, did not want the conflict to be considered as an industrial war, but the government saw it, or claimed to see it, as a potential revolution, and organized to meet whatever eventualities might arise. Mr. Baldwin left no doubt as to the attitude of his government on the question:

We were confronted last week by a great alliance of trade unions who had the power and the will to inflict enormous and irreparable damage on their country. Had a stoppage come, it would, as I said earlier in my speech, have caused an infinite amount of damage in the country. . . . [But] I am convinced that, if the time should come when the community has to protect itself with the full strength of the Government behind it, the community will do so, and the response of the community will astonish the forces of anarchy throughout the world.²

The events in May 1926 quickly put to the test the prime minister's statement. The government had taken advantage of every opportunity to prepare for a possible conflict. The strikers were quite unprepared. Their leaders had hoped up to the very last moment that the conflict could be avoided.

The left wing leaders of the I.L.P., on the other hand, were quick to respond to the miners' appeal for support. In the report of the Executive of the I.L.P. to the conference in 1927 it is stated that the entire machinery of the organization was placed at the disposal of the Trades Union General Council on May 1. Party officers worked at the headquarters of the Trades Union Congress, and members of the rank-and-file took an active part on local strike committees.

The nine days revealed a spirit of solidarity and devotion

¹Ibid., Vol. 205, pp. 1793-94.

²Ibid., Vol. 187, pp. 1591-92. See also the Times, May 18, 1926.

which was a wonder to all who took part in it. We are proud that the I. L. P. membership responded so magnificently, shoulder to shoulder, with their fellow-members.¹

And in conclusion, the report declared:

The tragedy of the defeat of the miners was not only theirs; it was ours; the whole Labour Movement shared in it. There were, no doubt, mistakes by the miners' leaders as well as by the leaders of the Trade Union Movement generally. But the miners' spokesmen certainly voiced the spirit and the convictions of their members, and if the whole Labour Movement had been animated by the same determination, the results had been very different. Our duty now is to right the wrongs from which the miners suffer as a result of the "settlement."²

Such a statement is certainly in marked contrast to those of the leaders already cited. To the I.L.P. the strike was not a mistake, but evidence of the solidarity of the labor movement in face of a great crisis and the beginning only of greater efforts. To the more conservative Snowden, the struggle was quite different. We have already observed his remarks addressed to the house of commons on the second day of the conflict. Three years later, he re-stated his earlier views:

During the nine days of the strike, I remained silent. From one point of view I was not sorry that this experiment had been tried. The Trade Unions needed a trial of strength. A general strike is an attempt to hold up the community and against such an attempt the country will mobilise all its resources. . . . The lesson of this strike was learnt by the Trade Union leaders. Since then there has been no repetition of such a hopeless adventure, nor is it likely that there will be so long as the memory of this unfortunate experience survives.³

The Executive of the I.L.P. would and did support the miners in their efforts to resist a reduction in wages. In addition, it would mobilize the whole trade union movement for the struggle.

¹Report of the 35th Annual Report of the Independent Labour Party (London: The Independent Labour Party, 1927), p. 4.

²Ibid., p. 6. The end of the general strike on May 17 did not close the struggle for the miners. They remained out until November 19, when exhaustion of resources and the steady dribbling back of the men to work caused them to surrender.

³Philip Snowden, An Autobiography (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1934), III, 731-32.

Snowden, on the other hand, viewed the general strike, as he himself expressed it, simply as an "interested outsider." One might well ask, in reply, from what date could Snowden claim to be an "outsider" to any labor cause? Wheatley, the successful administrator of the Housing Act of 1924, and now in 1926 considerably to the left of MacDonald, Snowden, and Thomas, was contemptuous of the leadership exhibited by those men in the general strike:

The qualities which distinguish men in a drawing-room, a palace, or a debating society are of little use in a vital struggle. Smart quips and polished manners play little part amidst grim realities. From the first moment of the struggle, and, indeed, before that, prominent leaders were whining and grovelling. The day before the general strike was declared we were told by one of the men who were going out to lead us that defeat was certain. . . . The real tragedy was that in its hour of trial the Labour movement was deserted by those in whom it had placed its greatest trust.¹

The attitude of the Trades Union Congress towards the crisis in 1926 is worthy of notice. Perhaps the most significant aspect was the silence of the General Council. No official or public statement was made between May 12, the day the general strike ended, and September 6, the date the annual conference met in session at Bournemouth. A report on the strike was to have been made to the Executives of the trade unions, but it was postponed pending the settlement of the miners' own strike. It was again postponed at Bournemouth for the same reason. It could not be dismissed entirely however. President Pugh made reference to it in his address. He admitted that a strike, under the conditions prevailing in May, was inevitable, and a reflection of the discontent of the workers with the industrial system. It was also a protest against "the traditional idea that bad trade can be made good, economic vitality and progress attained, and industry placed in a healthy condition by the mere expedient of degrading the standard

¹Times, May 21, 1926.

of life of the working people."¹

Pugh's comparatively short statement on the general strike was practically the only commentary on the crisis at the Bourne-mouth Congress. At one point in the conference when an attempt was made to force the General Council to make a report on the general strike, Pugh replied that the agreement to refrain from discussing the strike had been made with the Executive of the Miners' Federation itself. On this point, he was supported by A. J. Cook, secretary of the Miners' Federation.

This agreement to refrain from discussing the general strike practically meant the end of the question. Nor did it receive much more consideration at the conference of the Labor Party at Margate a month later. The Executive presented a resolution praising the miners for their magnificent resistance against the demands of the coalowners; it also protested against the government's support of the mine owners in permitting the passage of the Coal Mines Act extending the working day which would only result in a prolonged and embittered dispute. The resolution concluded by averring the belief that nationalization was the only solution of the problems facing the coal industry.²

The Executive did not permit the I.L.P. to introduce its resolution providing for a levy upon all organizations within the Labor Party. The reason given was that the trade unions were already over-burdened by calls for aid from their own needy members, and that to pass such a resolution would be futile. Ramsay MacDonald pointed out that the best aid to the miners was not on the industrial field, but by political action. Nationalization

¹Report of the 58th Annual Trades Union Congress (London: The Co-operative Printing Society, 1926), p. 72.

²Report of the 26th Annual Labour Party Conference (London: The Labour Party, 1926), p. 192.

of the mining industry was the solution:

Whatever happened, their fight would only begin on the new plane as soon as the present crisis had come to an end. That new plane was the house of commons and the policy was¹ the Nationalization of the Mining Industry of the country.

One idea dominated the proceedings at Margate. That was the determination of the Executive not to show any favor to industrial strife as the solution of labor's problems. MacDonald and others believed in the more gradual process of political action. Robert Williams, in his presidential address, remarked: "I cannot foresee Socialism coming from the increasing misery of the masses. In a resourceful, resilient, industrial community like our own, we cannot subvert or overthrow, we must supersede."²

The majority of the leaders, both at Bournemouth and Margate, were obviously anxious to avoid anything like a full-dress debate on the general strike. The minority groups were equally desirous of a full explanation of the conduct of the leaders during the conflict. The latter believed that events took the course they did largely because of apathetic leadership. Severe criticism of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress was expressed in I.L.P. circles:

The root of the matter is this. This Council, the Left and the Right alike, allowed itself to be obsessed by a Report drafted by four liberal-minded gentlemen of the employing class. They said "no subsidy"; and with all the power of a militant working class behind it, it never dared to demand a prolongation of the subsidy for more than a few weeks. . . . It thought and it talked in terms of Samuelian Liberalism. Even for talking, that doctrine makes a poor brief for Socialists. But when they fight with this star to guide them they will flounder and mislead. The Movement must find bolder men to lead it than these statesmen of the Right and stouter men for its vanguard than these orators of the Left.³

A communist critic also saw weak leadership as a cause for the failure of the strike; but another factor was also responsible.

¹Ibid., p. 200.

²Ibid., p. 170.

³New Leader, July 9, 1926.

A new factor had entered into the situation in 1926:

The new feature of 1926 was that for the first time the battle was directly between the capitalist state and the whole working class. From this to conscious revolutionary struggle is an inevitable next stage. It is because they know this that the bourgeoisie are concentrating all their force on preparing for this future struggle, and are endeavouring to use the moment of victory to shackle the working-class movement for the future, introduce new legislation, make the general strike illegal, and in every way by process of law hold off the inevitable future.¹

The failure of the general strike was not entirely without value to the workers. It not only raised a question as to the nature of the leadership upon which they had depended, but it also revealed the nature and extent of the opposition they had faced. Moreover, the struggle was not ended with the close of the strike. They were still to feel the strength of the government's opposition. In July, Parliament repealed the Seven Hours Act of 1919 for miners, and the following year the Trades Disputes and Trades Union Act was passed. This drastic measure made general and even sympathetic strikes illegal, picketing was greatly restricted and trade union funds were made liable for damages arising out of such illegal strikes. In addition, trade union workers, if desirous of setting aside their dues for political activities must definitely make a declaration to that effect. This new process was known as "contracting in" as compared with "contracting out" under the 1913 Trade Union Act.

The British labor movement was learning that the loser in an industrial conflict has a high price to pay. Thomas Shaw, Minister of Labor in the first MacDonald government, saw the bill as an attempt to destroy the Labor Party before it became too strong. "If I may express an opinion, the reason for this Bill is not the general strike; it is the fact that the Labour Party is growing

¹R.P.D., "Notes of the Month," Labour Monthly, June, 1926, p. 325.

stronger."¹

The official organ of the Trades Union Congress and the Labor Party bitterly exclaimed:

There are no two opinions about the significance and importance of this Bill. It is a challenge of the most sweeping kind imaginable to the whole structure of the Labour and Trade Union Movement; it is (to borrow its own carefully double-barrelled phraseology) "designed and calculated" to cripple us politically and break us industrially. . . .²

Snowden was no less acid in his estimation of the purpose of the bill. He did not agree with the suggestion that the government did not know its own mind in presenting the bill.

The Government know their own mind quite well. Their intentions are to destroy both the industrial and political organisations of the trade unions. . . . They have not put into actual words their intention; they have hidden it in a mass of verbiage and ambiguity, leaving prejudiced courts to interpret and carry out the hidden intentions of the Bill.³

We may quite logically ask, at this point, if the failure of the general strike and the subsequent passage of this adverse legislation was not, in part at least, the price that the labor movement was paying for its "rightest" tendencies of recent years. We have noted the failure of the conferences at Margate and Bournemouth to deal seriously with the great industrial crisis of 1926. This was followed, a year later, by developments which were far from reassuring to the leftist elements. The move to the right was more pronounced. The old methods had failed, and a new policy must be found. It was discovered in the "peace in industry" campaign which originated in the latter part of 1926. George Hicks, president of the Trades Union Congress at the Edinburgh conference in 1927 favored a policy of greater "co-operation" between employers and employees. He remarked in the course of his presiden-

¹Parl. Deb., 5s, HC, Vol. 205, pp. 1673-74.

²Labour Magazine, May, 1927, p. 24.

³Parl. Deb., 5s, HC, Vol. 207, p. 2160.

tial address:

Our Trade Unions have not yet reached the limit of their development. Rather, I would say that we are just at the beginning of the constructive period of Trade Unionism and practically nothing has yet been done to establish effective machinery of joint conference between the representative organization entitled to speak for industry as a whole. . . . We should not be deterred by allegations that in entering such discussions we are surrendering some essential principle of Trade Unionism.¹

Events moved rapidly. On November 23, 1927, the General Council of the Trades Union Congress received a letter from Sir Alfred Mond and twenty other influential industrialists inviting that body to a conference. The latter accepted the invitation. On January 12, 1928, the first conference with the employers took place, and on July 4 an interim joint report was adopted by the joint conference.

The most important recommendation of this report provided for the setting up of a national council to be known as the National Industrial Council. It would include representatives from the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, the National Confederation of Employers' Organizations and the Federation of British Industries.² By a large majority the report was adopted by the Trade Union Congress at Swansea, October, 1928.³ A year later, in December 1929, a joint committee representing the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, the National Confederation of Employers' Organizations and the Federation of British Industries accepted the schemes proposed by its joint sub-committee. These proposals provided, through the setting up of conciliation boards, the machinery for consultation and co-operation between the respective parties. This action of the joint conference was ratified

¹Report of the Trades Union Congress, 1927, pp. 66-67.

²Ibid., 1928, pp. 227-28.

³Ibid., p. 452.

by the three organizations separately, thereby coming into effect at once.¹ The significance of the whole matter was the fact that a permanent method of consultation had been approved.

Public opinion, in general, favored the agreement but wide differences prevailed within the labor movement. Referring to this conciliation board that would be set up for the prevention of disputes, the following criticism was advanced:

This is the essence of compulsory arbitration or the forfeiture of the right to strike. On the application of the employers alone, the trade unions bind themselves to hold up a strike until the conciliation board permits them, i.e., they surrender their sole advantage of rapid strike action. Just as with the Trade Union Act, the nominal right to strike is not yet removed, but the right to strike effectively is given up.²

Perhaps the clearest and frankest explanation of the trade union position towards "Mondism" was made by the secretary of the Trade Union Congress. He pointed out, with reference to the Edinburgh conference of the Trade Union Congress, that it was actuated by only one desire, that of evolving more efficient methods of carrying on industry and of improving the standards of employment. He admitted that such a policy was frequently characterized as one of "making peace with capitalism." He also admitted that to many it was considered a betrayal of the workers and a surrender of principles.³

In reply, he agreed that it was never possible for the trade unions to make peace with capitalism. But there was no reason why trade unions could not work to improve standards of living. Strikes were the exception, not the rule of trade union practice. The function of the trade union was not merely to

¹Ibid., 1930, p. 160.

²Labour Monthly, August, 1928, pp. 455-56.

³Walter M. Citrine, "Where are the Trade Unions Going?" Labour Magazine, October, 1927, p. 246.

"smash capitalism."

The true psychology is the one that recognises that as an historical fact the Trade Unions have all along been engaged in trying to get the most out of capitalism in the interests of the workers, defending the workers' standards and striving to improve them, resisting aggression from employers, and meeting the dictatorship of irresponsible groups by the organization of social and economic power, pending the supersession of the Capitalist system by a new industrial order.¹

To the left wing group in the Labor Party this trend was fraught with grave danger. The culmination came in the Maxton-Cook Manifesto in 1928. These two men, leaders in the I.L.P. and the Trades Union Congress respectively, determined, if possible, to check labor's movement to the right. On their own personal initiative they drew up the Manifesto wherein they repudiated the moderate leaders and policies of the Labor Party. Addressed to the workers of Great Britain, the Manifesto declares:

For some time past a number of us have been seriously disturbed as to where the British Labour Movement is being led. We believe that its basic principles are: (1) An increasing war against poverty and working-class servitude. This means an increasing war against Capitalism. (2) That only by their own efforts can the workers obtain the full product of their labour. These basic principles provided the inspiration and the organisation on which the Party was built. They were the principles of Hardie and other pioneers who made the Party.

But in recent times there has been a serious departure from the principles and policy which animated the founders. We are now being asked to believe that the party is no longer a working-class party, but a party representing all sections of the community. As Socialists we feel we cannot represent the views of Capitalism. Capitalism and Socialism can have nothing in common. As a result of the new conception that Socialism and Capitalism should sink their differences, much of the energy which should be expended in fighting Capitalism is now expended in crushing everybody who dares to remain true to the ideals of the Movement. We are convinced that this change is responsible for destroying the fighting spirit of the party, and we now come out openly to challenge it. We can no longer stand by and see 30 years of devoted work destroyed in making peace with Capitalism and compromises with the political philosophy of our capitalist opponents.²

Commenting on the Manifesto, an American observer remarked:

¹Ibid., p. 247.

²Scanlon, op. cit., pp. 107-109.

The revolt, however, only brings into the open fundamental party differences which have existed for years. Intensified by the failure of the general strike the determined efforts of the central leaders to drive all Communists from the local organization, and the exclusion of Marxian doctrines from the party electoral program, these differences now threaten to split the Labour vote in the coming campaign and definitely to divide the Labour Party.¹

The Conservative viewpoint was expressed with penetration by the Saturday Review.² It offered three explanations for this moderate course, (1) the general strike, (2) the Trade Disputes Bill, and (3) the serious alarm over the future of England's staple industries. Whatever may be the reasons, the fact remained that the Labor Party had become less warlike, nationalization was no longer emphasized and a "Locarno spirit" in industry was in process of development by virtue of this conference with Lord Melchett. The explanation for the revolt of Maxton might possibly be this:

It is out of dissatisfaction with this new spirit and also with what is regarded as the too Fabian and timid leadership of Mr. MacDonald that the revolt of Mr. Maxton and his friends has arisen. The first open sign of quarrel in the party was the departure of Mr. Wheatley from the Front Opposition bench to the back benches of the Clydesiders; the recent manifesto of Mr. Maxton is the formal declaration of a state of war which has in fact existed within the Party for many months.³

The manifesto began as a protest of two men. It became the issue dividing two parties. By a vote of seven to six the Executive of the I.L.P. supported Maxton's attitude as expressed in the Manifesto.

The I.L.P., the principal Socialist organization of the Labour Party was committed to opposition, not only to the Trade Unionists who are engaged in conversations with the capitalists, but to the present leadership of Labour in Parliament. Its battle cry of "Socialism in our time" is directed against Mr. MacDonald's Fabianism, which would put off the Socialist State to the millenium. and Mr. MacDonald has answered by denouncing the battle-cry as a "flashing futility." The I.L.P.

¹Ralston Hayden, "British Labour Movement Facing Split," Current History, August, 1928, p. 857.

²Saturday Review, July 7, 1928, p. 5.

³Ibid.

has some allies, notably Mr. Cook among the trade unionists, but in the T.U.C. the struggle has already been decided. The revolt is almost certain to fail.

Failure however, may not be purely negative. To acknowledge defeat and go on as before is hardly in keeping with the character of Mr. Maxton and his friends, and it is more likely that having failed to bring round his party he may secede and form a separate organization. Thus we may have two Parties, the Independent Labour Party, which is Socialist and anti-Fabian, and a Parliamentary Labour Party, which has Fabian Socialist leaders and an enormous following of Trade Unionists without any distinguishing principles at all, except to make the best terms for themselves and their trade.¹

The Executive voted to support Maxton. The latter held that he had simply expressed a view sanctioned by several conferences of the party and that his purpose was "to give an effective lead to opinion in spirit and a speedier attainment of Socialism."² The Executive also declared, "It re-affirmed the distinctive policy of the I.L.P. which rejects in the approach to Socialism both the inevitability of gradualness and the inevitability of violent revolution, and which seeks to create among the workers the will to advance to Socialism rapidly by a combination of political and industrial action."³ Fenner Brockway made the following significant statement:

The Labour Party has become a great power in the land, but as is the habit with human institutions, the tendency has been to lose its early revolutionary spirit, to feel less keenly the urgency of the injustice and tragedy of power, to become moderate in its respectability, to compromise and go slow. It has succumbed to the fatal philosophy of the inevitability of gradualness. No one suggests that we can step into Socialism in a day, but those whose mission it is to bring Socialism, and bring it as rapidly as possible, lose their inspiring and creative power as soon as they settle down to acquiescence in its long drawn out coming. On the other hand, we have had since the war the appearance of the small but active Communist Party with its equally fatal philosophy of the inevitableness of violent conflict. Both are philosophies of despair. The fatalism of violence is equally deadening to creative power as the fatalism of slowness.⁴

¹Socialist Review, October, 1928, p. 6.

²New Leader, July 6, 1928.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

Maxton had drawn the issue between the two parties very clearly, but the consequences were greater than he intended. Relations between the parties were destined to become increasingly cool from 1928 on. In fact, the parties were already much farther apart than most of their members realized. Incidents like the Maxton-Cook Manifesto only gave emphasis to that fact. With both parties claiming the common loyalty of the British worker and claiming to advocate a similar philosophy, the question must inevitably arise as to the function and necessity of the I.L.P., the smaller of the two bodies. Perhaps the I.L.P. had set an unattainable goal for itself. A small propagandist organization could play an important role as a leavening force within a greater movement since missionary work was obviously still necessary, but the I.L.P. by virtue of its conflict with the Labor Party was a source of weakness rather than of strength.¹

Philip Snowden undoubtedly brought the question to a head by his resignation from the I.L.P. on December 28, 1927. In his letter to the secretary of the I.L.P., he observed:

For several years the conviction has grown upon me that the I.L.P. as a separate body has served its purpose, and that its continued existence is neither necessary nor useful. The Labour Party, since it permitted individual membership and adopted a definite Socialist basis, adequately fulfils all the purposes for which the I.L.P. originally existed. The I.L.P. now unnecessarily duplicates the work of the Labour Party and in doing so wastes money and effort which could be more usefully employed in the local parties. The old I.L.P., by creating the Labour Party, has made a far greater and more powerful instrument for creating the Socialist state than it could ever hope to be, and it might well be content now to merge itself in the larger life.²

The New Leader, The I.L.P. organ, briefly commented on Snowden's resignation:

Philip Snowden's resignation from the I.L.P. after 34 years

¹Egon Wertheimer, Portrait of the Labour Party (2d ed.; London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1930), p. 21.

²Snowden, op. cit., II, 746.

continuous membership will be regretted by thousands of Socialists throughout the country. New members coming into the I.L.P. will not understand this. They have only known him during recent years when his mind was obviously turned away from the I.L.P. But to the older generation his defection will mean the end of an epoch.¹

The I.L.P. was convinced however that it still had a definite function to perform in the labor movement and it was not prepared to go out of existence. It was a part of the larger Labor Party which was chiefly concerned with more immediate problems; but it must remain as the one distinct group which was to serve as the "definite Socialist nucleus within the Labour Movement."² The I.L.P. believed that it had three distinct functions: to restate socialist principles so gravely in danger of being overshadowed by current issues; to try to influence policies along socialist lines; and to work out in detail socialist policies on "key issues" in preparation for the opportunity when it should next arise.³

Nevertheless, by 1928 the situation was critical for the I.L.P. A casual observer would be justified in believing its work nearing an end. Mr. MacDonald was no longer friendly to it. Snowden had resigned and many other pioneers had transferred their first allegiance to the Labor Party. In Parliament, although 112 of the 157 Labor members were members also of the I.L.P., probably not more than a dozen or so would put that body first.⁴ The New Statesman observed:

Inevitably the Labour Party claims the first loyalty of the great majority. The I.L.P. may proclaim a policy widely different from that of the Labour Party in Parliament; but the I.L.P. members will follow the Labour Party's policy rather than the I.L.P.'s. On paper, it looks as if the I.L.P. were

¹Ibid., pp. 746-47.

²Fenner Brockway, "Issues at the I.L.P. Conference," New Leader, March 20, 1925.

³Ibid.

⁴New Statesman, April 14, 1928.

in a position to control the Labour Party and all its doings; but actually it had no influence at all. It may at times incommode Mr. MacDonald or annoy Mr. Snowden; but, in spite of it, they are fully able to go their own way, and to be sure that the I.L.P. members, who constitute the bulk of their Parliamentary following, will in the last resort rally to them rather than to the I.L.P.¹

This condition the New Statesman considered a sad commentary on the I.L.P., the party of Keir Hardie and the party which gave the Labor Party its program, and its most effective leaders.² For this condition the I.L.P. had only itself to blame. It had flitted from one thing to another and now it had adopted a new program, "Socialism in Our Time":

It must go to the Left, because only on the Left can it find even a plausible pretext for continuance. Yet it dare not, and will not, go completely Left because that means going Communist; and with its fundamental pacifism the Communist faith is utterly at war. It has sought in vain for years to discover a practicable programme midway between the programme of official Labour and the programme of Moscow. It has failed because no such programme is to be found. Its leaders have been merely wasting their efforts in a hopelessly unprofitable venture.³

Middle-class observers and students of the Labor movement have always found it difficult to appreciate the reason for the differences constantly arising in socialist parties. Accustomed to the almost machine-like loyalty which bourgeois parties exact of their followers, their failure to understand socialist party differences is not entirely unnatural.

A middle-class party is usually a well established part of the general life of the community; it has certain historical traditions and can always appeal to certain party traditions should the rank-and-file temporarily flag in their loyalty. The party is usually well financed. Above all, it seldom has to struggle seriously over principle with political opponents. Its differences are normally concerned with questions of method.

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

Like the middle-class parties, the various groups of socialists agree in general on principle, if by principle is meant the goal both hope to attain. But there the comparison ends. Socialists, except in Russia, are still minority groups throughout the world. They do not have the support of a powerful press, and they are not generally accepted in community life. They are forced to carry on propaganda constantly. They receive few plaudits from their fellows; they are more often the subject for taunts and jeers. These factors are not conducive to sweetness of temper. When they are combined with personal financial insecurity, as is usually the case among the leaders, tempers are easily frayed. In consequence, minor differences over methods can quickly assume monumental proportions; personal elements enter in and bitter attacks are often made.

The differences between socialists over the methods to be used in gaining their ends are also more significant than those of their middle-class opponents. The latter stand for the "status quo" in society, whereas the former are struggling for a new order. Socialists become embittered with each other because they are "idealists." Paradoxical as that may seem it is because they give a moral basis to their views. This is a source of both strength and weakness. Most of us tend to see life through shaded glasses and in various colors. The intense propagandist sees it as black and white and through unshaded glasses; there is less place for tolerant compromise in his formulae for governing life.

In consequence, strife tends to play a constant part in his relations with those who differ with him and particularly with those within the confines of his own group. Ellen Wilkinson in defending the need for a left wing illustrates this fundamental difference between the bourgeois attitude as illustrated by the

New Statesman, and the "black and white" attitude of the Socialist worker. "The fundamental difference between the Right and Left Wings of the Movement is she says the acceptance or otherwise of the fact of the class struggle in modern capitalist society." The test is "the type of issue on which men choose to make their stand."

The struggle between Right and Left is [she continues] the struggle to decide which plan of action, which policy shall be adopted by the mass Movement of Labour. The issue before the Movement is perfectly clear - class collaboration, gradualness, the political game of the Ins and Outs, or the incessant waging of the class struggle on all fronts until poverty and its cause, Capitalism, are abolished.

The New Statesman cannot see why socialists should differ over a common philosophy. Miss Wilkinson sees the difference between Right and Left as one of principle.

The fact remained, however, that the I.L.P. was no longer generally accepted as it one had been. Because of this declining influence, the purpose of the party had to be re-stated with clearness and definiteness. The purpose, the leaders believed, lay in its being a socialist party, standing in opposition to both the theory of the "inevitability of revolution" and to the "inevitability of gradualness."¹ The I.L.P. should therefore take a "centrist" position, organizing national life with a revolutionary fervor similar to that manifested in the period of the Great War; it should struggle for better wages, shorter hours, and more leisure and a redistribution of wealth; it should aim "at replacing economic and political imperialism by world economic reorganization and Internationalism."² Maxton, in referring to the resignation of Philip Snowden, took a position in marked contrast to that of the former Chancellor of the Exchequer:

¹New Leader Supplement, March 18, 1927.

²Ibid.

The object of the I.L.P. is to establish the Socialist Commonwealth, and the Socialist Commonwealth is that state of society in which land and capital are commonly owned and controlled for the benefit of the whole people, that state of society has not been achieved, and it is a bad form of treachery for any individual or any group to set itself a task, and run away from it before it is completed, provided that the task is a good and worthy one. It may be that as progress is made, it becomes clear that the job is bigger than originally dreamt of, the obstacles to be surmounted greater, and the human material available cast in less heroic mold than that required for the achievement of so great and revolutionary a change. Doubts and hesitations may arise in the mind and steps may falter, but honest men are compelled to finish what they set out to do.¹

Maxton emphasized still further the viewpoint of the leaders of the I.L.P. when he said:

It is assumed by many critics of the I.L.P. - whether kindly or unkindly - that its major function was to create the Labour Party and to persuade it to the acceptance of the Socialist Commonwealth as its avowed object. This task having been accomplished, they suggested that the I.L.P. should dissolve itself. That is wrong. The creation of such a Labour Party was one of the means to the end, not the end itself. The end is the Socialist Commonwealth, a state of Society as different from the existing society as heaven is from hell.²

Maxton's statement is clear and unequivocal, an expression of the type of idealism which characterized the earlier I.L.P. leaders such as Keir Hardie, Bruce Glasier and others.

It is certainly obvious that differences over principle and function affect the very basis of any organization. Carried to their logical conclusion, they ultimately involve the question of loyalty. Two groups cannot co-exist within a larger organization without a reasonable amount of co-operation and discipline. Decisions must be made and unanimity of action must be enforced, otherwise the organization will inevitably break into fragments. At the conference of the Labor Party in 1928, the question of loyalty was introduced by the Executive in a series of resolutions which would debar from national and local conferences, all persons who opposed regularly endorsed Labor candidates and persons who

¹Socialist Review, March, 1928, pp. 9-10.

²Ibid.

were members of political parties declared ineligible, either by the annual conference or by the National Executive for affiliation to the Labor Party.¹

Although intended primarily by the Executive as another way of closing the doors of the party to communists, the debate was more important than merely an attack on that group. Some delegates took the attitude that the door was really being shut against all criticism of party decisions and to those to whom party officials had taken a dislike.² This clash was therefore the first skirmish in a much more significant struggle. The cleavage was already in existence. Step by step, the I.L.P. had been gravitating into opposition, particularly since the alleged failure of the first Labor government.

With the formation of the second Labor government in 1929, an I.L.P. group, led by Maxton, did not hesitate to criticize it for failure to introduce drastic measures immediately for dealing with unemployment. One I.L.P. member of Parliament, John Beckett, explained the attitude of the "Maxton group" as follows:

No one is demanding that the Government in their present position should give us full-blooded Socialism. We are discontented because there is not the slightest sign of any coherent attempt to work out any home policy at all. The real opposition, as it has been called, comes from a growing group of I.L.P'ers who believe that while big Socialist schemes might have been impossible, the Government have had ample opportunity to bring forward sweeping progressive reforms, family allowances, public control of railways and mines etc., which would have had an immediate palliative effect.³

Beckett denied that any one desired to vote against the government and that on most occasions the group had voted with the government. But the time had come when every pledge could not be nullified.

¹Report of the 28th Annual Labour Party Conference, p. 23.

²Ibid., p. 163.

³John Beckett, "The Rebel M.Ps," New Leader, January 3, 1930.

The Unemployment Insurance Bill was the turning point. Brockway supported Beckett's views. Criticisms had been made that all Labor M.P.s. had not supported the government on such a critical test as that bill. Brockway contended that the "rebel" group opposed it because it was such an important question.¹ Maxton took the same position. In his presidential address to the I.L.P. in 1930, he declared:

It is not the function of a Labour and Socialist Movement to develop and improve capitalist industry. Its job is to endeavour to own and control the industry and distribute its product. Rationalisation is not designed for the benefit of the working-class. We urge, therefore, on the Government of the day that it is time they faced up to the suggestions that the I.L.P. make for the better use of the wealth of the country. When wealth production exists as it does, when unemployment is at its present stage, when consuming power is as it is, we ask that the Labour Movement should have a definite policy to secure a juster distribution of the national income.²

The majority of the Labor Party were opposed to the attitude of the "rebel" group. The Scottish Conference of the I.L.P., by a narrow majority, voted that there was an obligation to support the decisions of the Party. There was a legitimate place for criticism, and that place was within the party caucus itself. Above all, the conference was opposed to a small group coming to its own decisions irrespective of what was decided by the Parliamentary Labor Party. The Maxton group replied that they were remaining loyal to the "declared objects" of the I.L.P. and that by maintaining an independent position they were carrying out the traditional policy of the I.L.P.³

One of the Maxton group contended that the question of discipline arose out of the decision of the Parliamentary Party in

¹New Leader, May 23, 1930.

²New Leader, April 25, 1930.

³New Leader, January 17, 1930.

1929 which aimed to define the limits of freedom of the individual member. Broadly, that decision demanded that differences should be settled within the party councils and that the result be binding upon all members.¹ A potent cause for the disaffection was the fact that only one hour a week was allowed by the Parliamentary Party for discussion of pending legislation. The bills were already printed when put into the hands of the Labor members and this brief debate practically left no alternative but to support or reject any bill presented to the house of commons. This failure to provide adequate means for discussion of bills prior to presentation to the house, it was contended, was simply more evidence of the desire of the right wing group to make an intensive drive against socialist critics within the party.²

The issue was definitely joined by 1930. In that year the I.L.P. Conference decided to reorganize the party groups on a basis of adherence to I.L.P. decisions of policy. On July 30, a letter was sent out to the local organizations stating that "Proposed candidates should give an undertaking that they accept in general the policy of the party (I.L.P.), as determined by Annual Conference, and if elected, will be prepared to give effect to it in the House of Commons."³ On October 27, 1930, a second letter was sent to I.L.P. members of Parliament who had not replied to the letter of July 30 stating that they would be given a week to sign pledges of loyalty, otherwise their silence would be considered as a refusal to accept membership of the I.L.P. Parliamentary group.⁴

If the N.A.C. of the I.L.P. hoped to make any headway by

¹W.J.Brown, "Discipline Run Mad," New Leader, April 11, 1930.

²Ibid.

³New Leader, November 28, 1930.

⁴Report of the 31st Annual Labour Party Conference, p. 296.

such a method it was quickly doomed to disappointment. In November, 1930, the I.L.P. candidate in the East Renfrew by-election refused to abide by the conditions laid down by the National Executive Committee of the Labor Party respecting loyalty to the Parliamentary Party, and he was forced to run under I.L.P. auspices alone.¹

Of greater importance than either of the two incidents mentioned above was the meeting of the Executive Committees from the two parties. Meeting on July 25, 1930, they ironed out many differences. It was also decided that Maxton and Henderson continue the discussions with a view to placing the two organizations on a more satisfactory basis.² A series of letters passed between the two men, no final agreement being reached. The crux of the whole difficulty lay in the limitation imposed by the First Standing Order of the Parliamentary Party upon the individual members; "Any member who has conscientious scruples on any matter of Party policy shall be free to abstain from voting."³

The I.L.P. had previously maintained the right to oppose the decisions of the Labor Party. Maxton now maintained that right:

When they desired to support avowed Party policy, as stated in Labour and the Nation, as against modifications of that policy put forward by the Labour Government. Further, the I.L.P. had always claimed the right to carry out their policy of opposition to "War Credits" by voting against the various Service estimates.⁴

Maxton emphasized this position in a letter to Henderson on December 30, 1930, in which he expressed willingness on the part of the I.L.P. to accept the constitution of the Labor Party and the responsibilities that go with the status of an affiliated body. But he declared that the Standing Orders and Disciplinary Rules of the

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 293.

³Ibid., p. 296.

⁴Ibid.

Parliamentary Party could not be accepted "without substantial qualifications and reservation."¹

In the meantime a joint committee on party discipline composed of the consultative committee of the Parliamentary Party and the National Executive had been working on the question. In April, 1931, their report was presented to members of the Parliamentary Party. It recommended the setting up of a standing joint committee on party discipline, with power to examine alleged breaches of discipline reported to them by the Parliamentary Party or the National Executive. The standing committee would have power to report its conclusions to the local labor party, the trade union or whatever nominating body was concerned.² A further series of communications passed between the two party secretaries, Arthur Henderson, and John Paton, without result. Neither one was prepared to modify its position regarding Standing Orders.

The situation was brought to a head when the National Executive Committee, upon the recommendations of the joint committee on party discipline, proposed to the Annual Conference of 1931 that two amendments be added to Clause IX of the constitution. The first amendment refused nomination to the Parliamentary Party candidate who failed "to accept and act in harmony with the Standing Orders of the Parliamentary Party." The second amendment declared that all candidates failing "to accept or act in harmony with the Standing Orders of the Parliamentary Labor Party shall be considered to have violated the terms of this constitution." The conference accepted the proposed amendments and thereby they became a part of the constitution. In the General Election of 1931 the I.L.P. declined to accept this decision and nominated its own candidates under independent auspices.

¹Ibid., p. 297.

²Ibid., p. 298.

The Labor Party, after the election of 1931 reaffirmed the Standing Orders without amendment. Negotiations between Henderson and I.L.P. representatives continued, however, but without result. At the Easter conference of the I.L.P. in 1932 the disaffiliation question of withdrawal from the Labor Party was introduced, but was defeated by the narrow margin of 183 votes to 144. Further consultations between the parties took place, with the I.L.P. always insisting that affiliation was subject to an acceptable revision of the Standing Orders. The Labor Party reaffirmed its previous decisions on the matter. The I.L.P. then indicated that negotiations would terminate and that a special conference would be called to secede and plan a reorganization as an independent socialist party.¹ On June 22, 1932, the National Executive Committee of the Labor Party reaffirmed its adherence to the Standing Orders.² The special conference of the I.L.P. opened at Bradford, July 30, and by a vote of 241 votes to 142 decided to withdraw from the Labor Party. Formal withdrawal of the I.L.P. from the Labor Party took place in August.³

This break between the parties was an inevitable development dating from that day in 1918 when the Labor Party voted to widen its membership to include workers "by hand or by brain." The tendency was accelerated by the coming to office of the first Labor government in 1924. If the Labor Party was to continue it must have its own membership, and control over policy and tactics was a necessity. The I.L.P. was forced in spite of itself to fall back on the emphasis of socialist principles and try to convince the public that it still had certain functions to perform. Fortunately this task was made easier in view of the interest of the

¹Report of the 32nd Annual Labour Party Conference, pp.46-47.

²Ibid., p. 48.

³Ibid.

Labor Party in more immediate problems. Freedom to express its ideas would seem essential to the very existence of the I.L.P. Equally unsatisfactory would be any attempt to impose discipline upon it in any way. To the Labor Party, individual freedom of expression had never been objectionable - only "organized opposition." But these differences were minor, only the evidence of a deeper cleavage, that of philosophy and tactics.

Reformism - The Problem of Compromise

The most difficult problem facing socialists the world over is that of adhering to party principles and at the same time bringing practice conformity with those principles. Many reasons for this difficulty may be found. It may be due to the tendency of human nature to seek the easiest way out; it may be due to impatience, a refusal to wait for reforms to come about over a long period of time. Some socialists prefer to accept "nibbles" at reform within the more immediate present. Other socialists again find it hard to maintain an enthusiasm for a "cause" throughout their whole life-time and ultimately cool off in their ardor. This is particularly so when attractive material comforts are placed within their grasp, if, in return, they will moderate their extremist attitude. What makes this adherence to principle even more difficult is the fact that men are motivated largely by psychological factors over which they have little control and frequently even fail to understand. Because of their intangible nature these factors are difficult to appraise but they are none the less influential in shaping events for both men and parties.

The psychology of the British worker is not fundamentally dissimilar from that of the average citizen of the nation. An Englishman has been characterized as a man of action, rather than as a man of theory. He is believed to have little time for fine

mental distinctions:

Abstractions irritate him. Partly because he himself is a simple, sentimental, good-natured fellow, swung by heart, who vaguely feels himself handicapped when first principles are being discussed. The intellectual process he ignores. The passing of resolutions, which he mistakes for "action," he understands. What he calls "facts," he understands.¹

This aversion to abstraction is the basis of the broad cleavage between the continental socialist and the British socialist, who fail to understand each other, despite fairly continuous contacts with internationalism over a period of fifty years. The British worker revels in his "practicality," and abhors programs - one reason why the British Labor Party has been said to be without a real program in the sense of a "national concentration upon certain goals."²

All this [says one observer] has its origin not only in the poverty of the British worker's intellectual equipment, but, in part at least, in that "religious" spirit which one can say after experience of most of the European workers is peculiar to the Britisher, and which, in a sense, really does justify Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's use many years ago of the term "British Socialism," defining it as a special brand or "school." Many of us then hotly resented such labellings. Socialism was the same thing all the world over. We did not want "tinned Socialism." We wanted the international stew-pot. But we were wrong.³

Because the British worker is not troubled by dogma and particularly Marxist dogma, he approaches his problems with an "immediacy" quite foreign to the continental socialist. He has a greater elasticity of viewpoint and adaptability to every day affairs, and, in consequence, finds it less difficult to absorb those groups which are not from the working class. The influx of very considerable numbers from the middle class, after 1918, is probably evidence of this.

Religion has had an important part in shaping the British

¹Shaw Desmond, Labour: The Giant With the Feet of Clay (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1922), p. 30.

²Ibid., pp. 32-33.

³Ibid.

Labor movement. It is certainly difficult to find Marxian influence to any appreciable extent. One writer believes that it has been very small by comparison with religious influences, particularly Non-conformist. Unlike the continental movement, British labor has never been hostile to the Church.¹ On the continent, on the other hand, the socialist movement arose in response to the writings of a group of thinkers, particularly those of Marx. The latter's writings have become a Bible to his followers and to fail to believe is to invite the charge of heresy.² This informal, care-free attitude of the British towards dogma does however have its advantages. Where the continental movement will readily split over points of doctrine, the British socialists may lose some followers, but the movement, as a whole, is much more likely to remain intact fundamentally:

And in this groping manner British Labour has grown, developing its Socialism half consciously, perpetually adapting itself to new situations. Its lack of rigidity resembles that of the British Constitution, and perhaps the cause is the same in both cases - a national distrust of dogma, a national tendency always to leave a loophole.³

This view that the British labor movement is predominantly an opportunist group is emphasized by an American observer, who remarks, ". . . in general, British Labour has no philosophy, no general outlook, but deals in piecemeal gains by compromise and opportunism, with floundering sureness, like the land progress of a seal."⁴

Other influences have also given shape to the British Labor Party. These must be looked for in the basic origins of the

¹Keith Hutchison, Labour and Politics (London: Labour Publishing Co., 1925), p. 9.

²Ibid., p. 10.

³Ibid., p. 11.

⁴W. H. Crook, The General Strike (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1931), p. 284. He quotes Arthur Gleason, What the Workers Want, p. 18.

movement.

The Labour Movement owes its origins to a variety of schools of thought. It would be hard to say whether Paine or Owen, Mill or Morris was the more influential. British Labour has never understood, nor liked what it has understood of Marxism, nor produced a Marx of its own. Dr. Wertheimer has seen all this, but has not fully realized its meaning. In essentials the Labour Movement is the direct heir of nineteenth-century Liberalism. It has extended that Liberalism in several directions, holding on the basis of experience that liberty means little except on the basis of substantial economic equality, and that property is a human right which involves so much control over other people that it cannot be treated in the same category as freedom of speech or person. The British working-class still remains to a large degree pietistic and evangelical, and it has only gradually shed that deep antipathy to any extension of State power which was born of the seventeenth-century struggle for religious liberty, and kept alive by the aristocratic nature of the British State. The working-man in England has looked to his Trade Union rather than to the State for his emancipation, but as the possibility of a democratically-controlled State has grown nearer, the individualism of trade unionists has been modified and the doctrines and co-operation of middle-class Socialists accepted. The strength of the Labour Movement lies in the fact that it has inherited the democratic organization and rooted loyalty of trade unionism, and yet continued to avoid the rigidity of a class party. Hence Dr. Wertheimer's surprise that the intellectual and the aristocrat are easily accepted in the Labour party and that Labour representatives are permitted so much more independence than is conceivable in a Continental Labour Party.¹

The British labor movement is not entirely absorbed in improving material conditions. It is prepared to give due emphasis to such matters and one of its main counts against the prevailing social order is the waste of natural resources and human capacity. Yet the main note of criticism is ethical rather than purely economic.²

¹Manchester Guardian Weekly, July 19, 1929. This is a review by "K.M." of Wertheimer's book, Portrait of the Labour Party. It is also a reply to Wertheimer's surprise at finding that the British Labor Movement did not rest on any one philosophic foundation. He admitted that the Party had theorists, but its policy was guided, "by expediency and proceeds from one set of proposals to another without taking much account of their relation to any defined economic theory or any accepted interpretation of historical evolution" (*ibid.*).

²R. H. Tawney, The British Labour Movement (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925), pp. 153-54.

It [the movement] is the child, not of Marx, great man though Marx was, but of Robert Owen, of Ruskin and of Morris. And it would continue to insist on the necessity of social reconstruction even though it could be shown that no great increase in the material wealth of the average family would result from the change.¹

If this interpretation is accepted, obviously there was no place for revolutionary theory in the party. In fact, even prior to the formation of the I.L.P., the Fabians led by George Bernard Shaw, the Webbs, and others, had denounced the class theory of society, class antagonisms, and the tactics of the class struggle.² The very essence of the I.L.P. doctrine was a denial of the idea of revolution and the labor theory of value; rather, society would develop by gradual "functional and structural" changes and finally pass "at the given moment into the socialist commonwealth by means of reform."³

In the year 1906 the trade unions and the socialists were united in the Labor Party. To be united, however, within one organization does not necessarily mean complete unity. The approach of these two groups to social and economic questions was entirely different. The trade unions were practical and not given to "programme making and visionary dreams." Because of their numerical strength and financial power they retained a distinct and separate identity. In politics many trade unionists were Conservatives and often opposed many measures which they believed extreme. The I.L.P. and the Fabians on the other hand, dominated the local socialist and co-operative societies. The combined non-trade unionist strength in the Labor Party therefore became greater after 1918 with the influx of middle-class adherents, while that of the

¹Ibid.

²Theodore Rothstein, From Chartistism to Labourism (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930), pp. 201-202.

³Ibid.

trade unions tended to decline in influence. The Labor government in 1924 did not achieve anything of moment, but the two great strikes in 1926 did strengthen the radical tendency.¹

One view of the aims of the movement is expressed by the seven members of the Labor Party who collaborated, on the eve of Labor's first government, in a booklet entitled, The Labour Party's Aims. They assert that doctrinaire socialist thought has gradually been supplanted by "reformist" programs, with socialist principles falling more and more into the background.² This is true of western socialist and Labor parties in general which are "revolutionary in sentiment, but always 'evolutionary' in practice; their policies are developed to meet the circumstances of the day, and they claim for the expediency which rules them the virtue of practicality."³

Must the Labor Party therefore admit the existence of "reformism" and modify its view accordingly or can it successfully combat such a condition? The seven members declare that the greatest danger for the Labor Party lies in the temptation to be content with temporary programs to meet the needs of the moment:

. . . . if it is content with Reformism instead of fundamental changes in Society; if it seeks to burden capitalism rather than to abolish it; then will Labour come to power, not as the "Hope of the World" or the "Bringer of the New Dawn," but as the temporary alternative to a Capitalist Government of Liberals or Tories. It will form its Government, introduce a popular measure here or unpopular measure there. . . . Or again, if they fear to launch a great scheme lest it raise opposition in this or that class or the electorate. In short, it will do as other Governments, a little more wisely, more honestly and more thoroughly; and in due course will play its part in the old political game of the "Ins" and the "Outs." Unless it gets down to principles, to the bedrock of the Socialist organization, of the functions of the community, it will have the "lower orders of the people" a trifle solaced and comforted and the remainder engered and fevered in their opposition. Thus will the old see-saw-progress weighted with re-

¹William Dibelius, England (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930), pp. 201-202.

²The Labour Party's Aim, A Criticism and Restatement by Seven Members of the Labour Party (New York: MacMillan Co., 1924), p. 13.

³Ibid.

actionary opposition and reaction mitigated by progressive criticism - continue to stir the soft airs of the House of Commons.¹

In political practice, the dead hand of "reformism," the seven members contend, is quickly reflected in the nature of the leadership offered. "Reformism" tends to restrict the scope of their thought and too often ends in their ceasing to think in terms of socialism at all.² An example of this, they aver, is the matter of the capital levy. Those Labor candidates who feared the attacks of their opponents lost votes because of their moderate attitude, whereas those who fought vigorously for the capital levy as an effective way of paying off the burden of debt were given strong support. They had appealed to the electorate on "the socialist principle of a just distribution of wealth, and the electorate of workers - by hand or by brain - accepted the principle."³ The fact that this group of seven wrote on the very eve of the Labor Party coming to power, makes their warning of particular significance.

The problem of maintaining "consistency" in principle and action, George Lansbury held, was not necessarily a virtue in itself. Speaking to the Labor Party conference, he referred to a charge of inconsistency made by an opponent in the house of commons with regard to a certain policy advocated by the Labor government. He had replied:

Being a political Party we have to live from day to day,
and each day we are compromising and each day we are having

¹Ibid., p. 16.

²Ibid., pp. 17-18.

³Ibid., p. 18. R. H. Tawney, in his review of The Labour Party's Aim, says that the aim of the seven members is to prevent the Labour Party falling into the Liberal weakness of living, "on formulae which mean everything in general therefore nothing in particular, will be as timid in action as it is bold in phraseology, and will harass Capitalism instead of building up socialism" (New Republic, November 28, 1923).

to accept proposals which do not carry out to the full the principles we believe in. That is because we are human beings living in a human society.¹

Lansbury was nothing if not honest. That honesty has been the cardinal and motivating virtue of his life, which even his bitterest opponents would not deny. Like all other Labor leaders he had to face the problem of compromise. He faced it by admitting it as a necessity. He said further, "In life it is not possible to act as a revolutionary and practical person at one and the same time."² He could sympathize with those who refused to compromise, but for him "immediate alleviations through local and national politics" seemed the method to pursue. It meant compromise and he admitted it. It was not, however, a compromise of principle but of method. Yet there was no place in his strategy for "political alliances" such as a Liberal-Labor alliance to the end that "something might be done." Those who favored such an alliance he considered traitors to the cause of socialism. He remarks in his Autobiography:

A Labour Government will be of use and service to the workers only in so far as it is willing and able to pass Socialist legislation. This is the only reason for the existence of such a Government. It is not a change of men only that we work for, but a change, which will give us men in power able and willing to give us Socialism. Reforms even of a far-reaching character may be obtained from Liberals and Tories. It is better to leave the task of passing such legislation to them and ourselves remain out of office until we have the power to carry through our own policy. Democracy must take up the challenge thrown down to us by Bolshevism on the one hand and Facism on the other. We have to prove that the possibility of creating a Socialist state is a real one and that we are in earnest in our efforts to put this policy through.³

The real problem however was not in the clash of idealism and practice in a Lansbury or men of his mould of thought. It was

¹Report of the 29th Annual Labour Party Conference, p. 205.

²George Lansbury, My Life (London: Constable & Co., 1928), p. 193.

³Ibid., Preface, pp. 11-12.

more often in the inability of the average labor member to see and understand principles clearly. Divergence between expressed principles and actual conduct, when the opportunity was given to put those principles into effect, was often due to that very fact. A French writer brings out this point clearly in reference to a suggestion by Sir Stafford Cripps, that "emergency powers" be given to a socialist government. The significant thing was that Cripps' proposal was not revolutionary and not new. It was merely dictatorial.¹ But it meant bitter denunciation for Cripps both by the Trades Union Congress and the Labor Party conference.

Fundamentally, both Cripps and the other Labor members were constitutionalists, but there had developed a difference of opinion as to the basic function of Parliament. This difference was largely created by the very conditions under which the working-man had grown up. All his life he had been accustomed to negotiate on peaceful terms with his employer. He had never conceived of himself sitting in the shoes of his employer, with the roles somewhat reversed.² He did not see this new role as an opportunity to force his former master to live under an absolute rule. Rather he saw himself as a limited monarchy, merely controlling and limiting the captains of industry and trying to get as ideal conditions for himself as possible.³ The real conflict for him was not entirely one of improving the conditions of the workers, but a matter also of the Parliamentary means to attain those conditions. Halévy remarks:

Now if you go to the root of the idea of Parliament, the system is not one which wants to make the State strong, but one which wants to keep it weak for the sake of liberty. This is

¹Halévy, "Socialism and the Problem of Democratic Parliamentarianism," International Affairs, XIII, 498.

²Ibid., p. 497.

³Ibid.

the tragedy. The Labour leaders are men whose doctrine requires them to make the State stronger, and whose good British instinct is to make the State as weak as possible.¹

When Cripps asked for "emergency powers," he was forcing Labor to decide between the belief in a strong state and the belief in individualism. The latter proved the stronger and Cripps was forced into a position of opposition. From a socialist standpoint what were the implications of this situation? The same writer, with succinctness and clearness, expressed them in terms of a concrete problem:

You may say that the programme itself is dangerous and that you do not care to see the Bank of England and the Big Five nationalised. But that is not my point. The fact is that this has been at the head of the programme of the Labour Party. When, therefore, on the one hand, they say that they want something, and, on the other hand, they do not want the means to obtain it, it is legitimate for one to ask what is at the bottom of their minds. I am afraid that rather than socialistic in spirit they are whiggish, eager to protect the individual against the State, not to make the State strong against the Capitalists.²

Carrying this argument to its logical conclusion, he remarks:

I would now go one step further, thus making the third and final part of my observations, and ask you whether there is not an inner contradiction running through the whole doctrine of Modern Socialism. Socialists believe in two extremely different things, perhaps contradictory; on the one hand, liberty, and on the other, organisation. Between them they fall to the ground.³

The program of the Labor Party bears out Halévy's observations. The socialist vocabulary was used freely both in resolutions and on the lips of Labor's leaders but in practice nothing must be done of a disturbing nature. Snowden said, "I want no further step forward to be taken until the previous step has been justified by its success."⁴ This attitude of caution would inevitably be strengthened when Labor assumed office. The Liberals

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 498.

³Ibid.

⁴Joseph Clayton, The Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain 1880-1924 (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1926), p. 202.

soon made it clear that the introduction of socialist legislation meant the defeat of the Labor government. If there were any serious fears that the Labor government would introduce such legislation, they would be quickly dispelled by one glance at the personnel of the first Labor cabinet. With Lord Parmoor, the ex-Conservative, and such ex-Liberals as Ponsonby, Trevelyan, Buxton and Haldane forming part of the government, it could not be more than a social reform group, certainly it could not be socialistic. Prime Minister MacDonald soon corroborated that impression. Speaking at Dundee on September 9, 1924, he admitted that socialism in his day was impossible, not because of a hostile majority in the house of commons, but because the time was not yet ripe. "It would be cutting green corn."¹ MacDonald declared that even if he were prime minister for fifty years, "the pledges I have given you from my heart would still be unfulfilled - not because I fainted or failed, but because the corn was still green." MacDonald used the same argument which his opponents had so frequently used against him in years past. "As far as Ramsay MacDonald and his colleagues were concerned the socialist movement in Great Britain had run its course and was finished. It was impossible - the establishment of a social democracy."²

If MacDonald believed, as he declared at Dundee, that even in fifty years a socialist society could not be brought into effect, we may ask if, in any essential way, his viewpoint differed from that of the British workers themselves. Halévy contends that the average British worker is interested in better wages, hours and working conditions, not in the nationalization of the "means of production, distribution and exchange."³ He is a believer not in

¹Ibid., p. 213.

²Ibid., p. 214.

³Halévy, op. cit., XIII, 495.

socialism but in "fiscalism," which is the policy of equalizing the differences of individual income by insurance plans, old age pensions, etc. "Fiscalism" is purely a policy of alleviation, not one which will change the profit-making system.

In agreement with this interpretation Tawney points out that the English worker sees "fiscalism" from two standpoints:

The first is that social policy is likely to be, at least, accelerated if it is intrusted to a party directly controlled by those for whose benefit it is desired. In the second place, without at all under-estimating the repercussions on his standard of life on world economic conditions, experience seems to him to suggest that the improvement in social conditions which he desires is to be sought along four main avenues; first, the establishment of minimum standards of life and employment with regard to wages, safety, health and hours of work, such as is represented by factory and minimum wage legislation; second, the extension of communal provision, such as is represented by the public health and education services, by old-age pensions and by maintenance during unemployment; third, the further graduation of taxation by means of an extension of the death duties and of the supertax on incomes, in such a way as to diminish economic inequality and to make available the resources needed to finance new social services; and fourth, the development of public enterprise both by local authorities and by the transference of certain foundation industries, in particular coal, the provision of electrical power, and railway transport, to the hands of suitably constituted public authorities.¹

Obviously such a program might take many years to complete. But it has the merit of being practical and capable of achievement. The program was not in inherent conflict with the general viewpoint of the worker in the factory or in the mine. But it does not explain why there was so much dissatisfaction within the party in those years included within the scope of this study. It does not meet the criticism of the Labor leaders implied in the Maxton-Cook Manifesto nor the more radical I.L.P. program, "Socialism in Our Time." This program was officially accepted by the I.L.P. at its annual conference at Whitley Bay in 1926. Brailsford refers to this conference at Whitley Bay as of great importance because it

¹Tawney, op. cit., pp. 51-52.

dealt with the one problem of most significance to all socialists:

It saw that our task is to gather up our forces to hasten the transition to Socialism. It repudiated the notion that a Labour Party can ever be content to administer the capitalist system. Its task in opposition or in office, whether it has a minority or a majority behind it, must be to transform that system. . . . A Labour Government will sooner or later find itself confronting the complex structure of industry, and it will have to decide by what steps it shall begin the colossal task of reconstructing it to realise the socialist ideal. . . . The resolution which the National Council placed before this Conference was the culmination and the summing-up of all this preparatory work. It surveys from the banks to the mines the key positions which the community must win and hold, if it is to control industry for the common good. But, above all, it proposed a starting point for our practical work, and emphasised a human motive to which we shall appeal in our effort to turn these plans into concrete reality. The starting point is the demand for a living income: the motive is the resolve to make an end of poverty.¹

Both parties professed adherence to socialist principles, and both claimed to be working for the establishment of the socialist commonwealth. Yet they quarrelled and ultimately split.

Probably the most insidious element creeping into the Labor Party was the tendency to look more and more to middle-class support and away from the working classes.

Everything possible is being done to convince the public that the Party is respectable and sage. Maxton and Cook are right in asking that the appeal of the Party should be primarily addressed to the working-class and that it should be a Socialist appeal, "an unceasing war against poverty and working-class servitude and against Capitalism."²

The trouble over party discipline was attributed to the compromising policy of the Labor Party, and the revolt of the Left was due to the actions of the Right. The I.L.P. constitution forbade its setting up opposition to the official candidates of the Labor Party, but that did not prevent the Left or the I.L.P. from carrying on its own policy. "We must assert our own policy which is distinct both from the timid gradualness of the Right and the

¹New Leader, April 9, 1926.

²Ibid., June 29, 1928.

catastrophic violence of the extreme Left."¹

Maxton charged that the Labor Party was too much taken up with the difficulties caused by the failure of capitalism and that it did not realize that any attempt to patch up capitalism would only end in failure; whereas, in fact, "the failure of capitalism can be made a great opportunity to apply socialist principles, and to begin the transition to Socialism."² There was no place in the I.L.P. program for small or isolated reforms and "gradualism" was a policy of failure. The solution lay in the nation guaranteeing the workers a living wage in return for their labor. "The Socialist looks at all the industrial services of the country as forming one national workshop and insists that the wealth created in this national workshop shall be distributed in such a way as to provide at least a living income for Every family before it provides a luxury income for Any family."³ This policy should be put into effect, he argued, by the government setting up a committee to decide on a living wage. "The Committee would take three points into consideration, first, the actual cost of living; second, the amount of national income; and third, the proportion of the national income necessary for replacement and the extension of capital."⁴ Power would be given to the government enabling it to enforce the living wage standard for all employees. The government would have authority to set up machinery by which the workers' right to control the distribution of wealth and the processes of industry would be recognized in that not only would working men sit on the committee to establish the national minimum standard, but the wives of working men as well; the workers would be represented on the board

¹Ibid.

²James Maxton, "The Living Wage," New Leader, February 6, 1931.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

authorized to apply the living wage standard to their particular industry; and the government would possess "emergency powers" to insist on the reorganization of those industries incapable of paying the living wage.

The I.L.P. program, "Socialism in Our Time" was clear evidence of the clash between the two parties. Both parties were committed to the securing of the key sources of economic power for the community, but the Labor Party held back from the idea of redistributing the national income to remove poverty. On paper the Labor Party accepted the principle of the living wage, but it balked at the idea of a Labor government using its full legislative and administrative power to attain it.¹ H. N. Brailsford, former editor of the New Leader explained what "Socialism in Our Time" means to the I.L.P. He admitted that in the final analysis the attainment of socialism can only be realised gradually, but misery was a continual spur to hasten the change which must inevitably come. To bring about these ends, certain strategic positions in society which can and do control the whole movement of industry and society, must be taken over.²

In plain words we ask for the transfer to social ownership and control of these regulative organs or services. We suggest that they are banking, the import of raw materials, the direction of the flow of new capital and also the more familiar things, coal, transport and electric power: nor ought we to forget the land. It is a big demand, if you will, a staggering demand, and yet it is manifestly in the line of modern tendency. And this, in the concrete, is what we mean when we talk of "Socialism in Our Time." . . . What we ask is, that the Party should concentrate its will and its thinking on this big objective, and consequently adopt this purpose as the central goal of its effort.³

The program of the living wage was the fundamental expression of the socialist belief of the I.L.P. Carried to its logical con-

¹New Leader, April 5, 1929.

²New Leader, April 29, 1927.

³Ibid.

clusion it would mean the overthrow of capitalism; for the moment it was a definite challenge to the Labor Party, and the basis of the ultimate break between the parties. It put the Labor Party on the defensive and forced it to declare its program. The I.L.P. stood for a program to be carried out here and now. Partly to meet this challenge, and partly to enunciate a Manifesto for the coming election, the Labor Party in 1928 published Labour and the Nation, a pronouncement covering nearly every phase of social and economic activity.

Its significance lay largely in the attitude which it assumed towards a socialist society. The wide range of subjects included within its scope was indicative of the workings of the minds of those responsible for its creation. In introducing the program to the Labor Party conference in 1928, Ramsay MacDonald declared that it was intended as something more than a plan for the immediate present or for the next election. In the past, propaganda had been the primary need of the party; now a new stage had been reached, that of putting into effect the principles which it had previously enunciated. The problem would arise, for example, as to how such matters as nationalization or a better distribution of wealth would be brought to pass. It could only be done, he averred, "clause by clause, proposal by proposal, line by line."¹

¹Report of the 28th Annual Labour Party Conference, pp.199-200. The Saturday Review sees Labour and the Nation as a document shrewdly compiled and with very elastic potentialities in the realm of active politics. It observes: "When a man is either too clever or too incompetent for the floor of the House of Commons, it is a common practice for Governments to send him to the Lords. The Labour Party has done much the same with its Socialism. It has put it in a book called 'Labour and the Nation,' in which every conceivable reform that could possibly be advocated from any left wing for the next hundred years is set out neatly in the form of some sixty odd articles. When it wants to appear practical and to obtain the support of the average elector, the book will be forgotten on the shelf; on the other hand when Labour wishes to show how staunch and downright its Socialism is the book will be taken down, dusted and produced in evidence. The chief business of the Conference has been to get the book ratified and this has been

Perhaps MacDonald has expressed here the fundamental difference between the two programs. While the I.L.P. would work to bring about socialism as once, the Labor Party would work towards socialism as an ideal. Maxton's reply to Mr. MacDonald emphasized this very clearly:

The main contention of the Independent Labour Party against this programme is that the whole foundation of it, the utterances of those who have been most strongly defending it lead one to the conclusion that they are looking at their responsibilities as if the approach to Socialism was to be a long slow process of gradualistic, peaceful parliamentary change. I take the view that a Labour Government will not be permitted by economic circumstances to proceed towards Socialism at that slow, easy, peaceful, gradualistic rate. . . . A Labour Government cannot run Capitalism any more successfully than Baldwin and the others. A Labour Government can only redeem its pledges, made for fifty years to the workers of this country. If a Labour Government recognises that nationalisation - public ownership has got to be done on large-scale operations at tremendous speed; if this nation - let alone the working classes of the nation - if this nation is to be saved from collapse and catastrophe you have got to get right into the problem of getting the ownership and control of the essential industries inside the term of the first Labour Government, and you will have to use all your industrial and co-operative force to achieve that change.¹

John Wheatley, Minister of Health in the first Labor government, was even more direct in his attack upon the Labor Party program. In terms of Parliamentary acts, there was material in Labour and the Nation for at least twenty-five acts, he contended, and to those familiar with the slowness of the parliamentary machine, that would mean, at the rate of one important measure passed in each session, work for five Labor governments, holding office for twenty-five consecutive years. Such a program was certainly the work of "gradualists."² Further, the program seemed weak in that it attributed the troubles of today to men, not to a system:

That is the point where we part company. We do not believe

done amidst the protests of Mr. Maxton" (Saturday Review, October 6, 1928, p. 413).

¹Ibid., p. 202.

²Ibid., p. 212.

that the troubles of today are due to the failure of capitalist leaders, but to the failure of Capitalism itself. We do not believe that a Cabinet of Angels from Heaven could run Capitalism successfully; we believe it has failed from its nature. From its very nature it has failed in distributing purchasing power amongst the people of this country which will enable them to buy up the product of their labour and the goods imported at a rate which will keep industry going, and International Trade going.¹

Finally, Wheatley opposed the Labor Party program on the ground that it contained no plan which could be looked to as a fairly immediate solution. Rather, it was merely a list of sixty-five items which would be handed over to the Executive or to the Parliamentary Party, and particularly to the leader of the Parliamentary Party, who would likely choose the line of least resistance and select those most likely to pass in Parliament; those items of a Liberal nature would be more likely to be accepted than those pressing for a socialist program. "Look down the 65 items," he said, "and tell me if you cannot find 15 first class measures that have nothing intrinsically Socialist about them, but would be adopted by any advanced Liberal in this country, and which might therefore make the basis of a working arrangement between Liberalism and Labour for probably a quarter of a century."²

In view of the two party programs, we may ask if the differences between the two parties were fundamental and irreconcilable. From a communist standpoint, the world of socialism, prior to the Great War, was dominated by social democracy, which is defined as "the philosophy of an expanding capitalism changing by a

¹Ibid., p. 213.

²Ibid. As a neutral observer, the Saturday Review summarizes the problem of the Labour Party as follows: "When a third man wants to squeeze in on a seat that has comfortable room for only two he has to sit gingerly on the edge; that is what the Labour Party has been doing at its Conference this week. It is in a double dilemma. It must so be practical as to distinguish itself from the other two parties, and it must so be Socialistic as to avoid the odium of the extreme mien and have more chance of winning elections" (Saturday Review, October 6, 1928, p. 413).

process of reforms and by education of its administrative side, through a reconstruction of itself to a socialist state."¹ At that time there was no organized opposition to this view. The Labor Party was closer to the Liberal Party. The I.L.P. was the real home of social-democracy in Britain. With the war however, a change took place. The Labor Party became larger and more pliant and itself became the embodiment of social-democracy in Britain, with the I.L.P. as merely a section of the Democracy. The significance of this may be thus described:

Whilst the Labour Party moved with the rest of Social-Democracy openly to defend and to stabilize Capitalism, the I.L.P. did not. It still desired by a process of rapid changes to pass into Socialism; it therefore became the left-wing of the Labour Party. It still desired and hoped for working-class and socialist support, whereas the Labour Party came more and more to desire Liberal support.²

The Labour Monthly, as early as 1926, had taken the view that though differences had grown up between the two parties, yet fundamentally the same principle underlay their thinking and action:

The propaganda of Capitalist revival and illusory hopes, which run right through the wholereformist leadership from Right to Left, from MacDonald and Thomas to Wheatley and Brailsford, may take a hundred forms. Some preach industrial peace, a new "conception" of Trade Unionism, "scientific" wage-policies, "industrial parliaments free from party politics," etc. (Cramp, Thomas, Pugh, Hodges, Williams, etc.). Others preach the return to unadulterated parliamentarianism, the abandonment of industrial struggle as hopeless, the acceptance of capitalist continuity, and embarkation on programmes of national and imperial reconstruction (MacDonald and the Labour Party machine). . . . Through all these forms, and the difference between the various forms and varieties of the same form there runs the same note - the note of capitalist revival, the illusory dreams of straightening of the capitalist chaos and the softening of capitalist class antagonisms in the face of every visible fact in the whole world. And through all three runs the same reality - the reality of working-class defeatism.³

¹Labour Monthly, January, 1932, p. 34.

²Ibid., p. 35.

³Labour Monthly, December, 1926, p. 710. An address by Philip Snowden provides further evidence of this acceptance of "continuity of Capitalism. "Ephesian" states that Snowden declared: "[It was] . . . sheer nonsense to suppose that the condition of

To the communist therefore there was no essential difference between the two parties. The quarrel between them was little more than a sham battle, or at least a quarrel over technicalities. A joint statement by Maxton and Brockway in the New Leader is taken as evidence of this:¹ "The present difficulties arose from the opposition of the I.L.P. to the compromising policy of the Labor government and its betrayal of working-class interests and the socialistic cause." But the Labour Monthly points out in the same issue, that on the same page of the New Leader John Paton, General Secretary of the I.L.P., states, "Had the will of peace existed in the Executive of the Labour Party, the difficulties could have been surmounted," and it draws the following conclusion:

It is in fact only the pressure of the present world-crisis, and not any basic change from reformism, that has compelled the present temporary apparent change of front of the I.L.P. It is a species of "crisis-socialism" or "crisis-revolutionism," as if the necessity of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism depends, not on the permanent conditions of capitalism and the working-class struggle, but only on the special temporary conditions of the present world-crisis. It is obvious that this type of "revolutionism" as a practical basis for a worker's party, is nothing but another form of opportunist floating on the surface of events, without plan or compass, and will rapidly ebb if capitalism shows a slight upward turn.²

The Socialist Review in its review of Trotsky's book

Whither England? reports him as stating that the I.L.P. was in

the working-class could not be improved without overthrowing the Capitalist system. Certainly, he admitted, our industrial system must be radically changed if harmony was to be established among all those concerned in it; there was bound to be strife while one of the necessary partners, Capital, remained a dictator, and on the other, Labour, was placed in a position of servility. Business must be recognized as a collective enterprise, in which Capital and Labour were essential factors; their stakes must be equal - the workers should become capitalists and the capitalists workers" (Carl E. B. Roberts, Ephesian, psued., Philip Snowden: an Impartial Portrait [London: Cassell and Co., 1929], p. 214).

¹Labour Monthly, September, 1932, p. 551. Taken from the New Leader, July 1, 1932.

²Ibid.

origin a "centrist" body, that is a body which agrees with the communists in aim but differs from them in regard to means. In other words, the I.L.P. is "Socialist in outlook and philosophy, but it is pacifist, Parliamentary, and constitutional."¹ Such a philosophy, Trotsky contends, is suitable only for small groups of a propagandist type who are far from achieving power. This was the position of the I.L.P. until about 1922. By that time, labor was growing so rapidly in power and in self-consciousness that it was in need of leaders. These the I.L.P. were able to supply. As a result, the I.L.P. suddenly found the wholeweight of organized labor behind it. At once it was transformed, he suggests, from a small propagandist organization into the second largest party in the nation. This newly acquired position, he states, created a new set of problems. "Centrism" was no longer possible. The I.L.P. was compelled to choose between turning sharply to the right or to the left. It was compelled to answer "yes" or "no" to many hard questions. In other words, it could no longer will the end without willing the means.

In analyzing further the reasons for the divergence between the I.L.P. and the Labor Party, one additional factor deserves particular attention, the psychological. One of the most important elements in any movement is the human factor. A movement is greater than the individuals that compose it, but it, in turn, cannot have breadth and scope unless it is led by individuals imbued with a definite philosophy who are prepared to carry over that philosophy into the world of practical affairs. This requires qualities of vision, idealism, and determination. It also requires an ability to make sacrifices for the sake of principle. This latter quality is most difficult to attain and probably the easiest

¹Socialist Review, February, 1926, p. 37.

to lose. It has been a constant challenge to Labor leaders in these post-war years and has constantly threatened to undermine the vigour of Labor leadership. That challenge assumes many forms:

In the first place there must be mentioned the effects of advancing age. With the accumulation of years, the fires of the agitator and of the youthful enthusiast burns with less intensity and gradually subside into smoldering embers. This is true of the bourgeois and trade unionist leaders alike. The ideals of youth have not been achieved; a sense of fatigue and disillusionment tends to set in. A participation in practical politics has brought with it the necessity of a compromise with opposing forces. The I.L.P. compromised with the Trade Unionists, the latter with each other, the Party as a whole with the middle-class electorate to allay their fears - all for the purpose of effecting some immediate aims which they believed necessary to the ultimate. Every compromise "represents a choice enforced upon consciousness between the final aim and the partial but immediately realisable objective." The average leader "soon comes to content himself with the conquest of these partial and practical aims, and to strive for nothing more remote."¹

Further, election to Parliament may destroy a man's desire to break up the social order; he may have attained power which now becomes the most important thing for him, or it may be social attractions of a nature in marked contrast to those of his earlier years. To quote Garratt in his book, The Mugwumps and the Labour Party, by 1923, the socialist leader had taken up a new life:

Most of the leaders had settled down to a comfortable life among the upper middle classes. They had been introduced to new and interesting sides of life which appealed strongly to them and even more strongly to their wives - music, painting, good furniture, and the conversation of men who had travelled, who ran large businesses, and who were artists.

Many had suffered during the war for their views. Now as members of parliament they were honored and in possession of some social standing. It would certainly take unusual strength of will to resist such influences. Other factors were also working towards a moderation of radical tendencies in the leadership:

Among these were: the check over the parliamentary Party's leaders by the caucus, the triple responsibility of Members

¹W. P. Maddox, Foreign Relations in British Labour Politics (Cambridge: Howard University Press, 1934), pp. 77-78.

to the Party, to their nominating groups, and to their respective constituencies, the growth of a more conciliatory political disposition through constant association with the "enemy" in Parliament, the vulnerability of Members to courtesies and political honors extended to them by the Government, the widening gap between the outlook of the work-bench or the propagandist soap-box and that of the long-established M.P., the necessity of subordinating ultimate objectives to considerations of parliamentary strategy, and the constant exposure of the plausible (and, with a growing sense of National responsibility, sometimes convincing) defense of the Government.¹

These psychological and therefore intangible factors undoubtedly played a large part in the life and work of many of the leaders and thereby caused a weakening in their effectiveness as socialists. The frequency with which this view has been reiterated by students of the British movement is an argument of some value in itself and provides a partial answer, at least, to the whole problem of "reformism."

That group which constantly places the first emphasis upon principles, is more likely to find new sources of enthusiasm and determination to achieve its aims than the organization which tends to sacrifice principles to immediate ends. Both the I.L.P. and the Labor Party were extremely critical of the Communist Party and rejected affiliation with it, but they have failed to realize that the latter body, despite opposition and persecution, has persisted in its determination to stand by its principles at all costs. They may frighten away the workers from uniting with them within a definite organization, by reason of their advanced views, and their insistence on complete conformity to party discipline. Yet by their continual emphasis upon principles they do win over many workers to at least a "theoretical" acceptance of their position. It might be contended with a fair degree of reason that the "rebel movement" within the Labor Party itself can be indirectly attributed to communist influence.

¹Ibid., pp. 231-32.

The strength of the Communist Party lies largely in its discipline and the insistence upon a simple, but clearly stated philosophy and program. By contrast, both the Labor Party and the I.L.P. have lacked that same directness of thought and action. Their programs change with the circumstances in which they find themselves and they vary in emphasis from election to election. At one time it is the living wage, at another time children's allowances or something else which is emphasized. This leads to confusion of thought among the general mass of workers. It too often raises false hopes that are only to be dashed to the ground when Labor cannot realize them on assuming office. This in turn creates a feeling of futility among leaders and followers.

Both parties had to face the problem of "reformism." For the Labor Party it was a temptation to seek "immediate ends" even if that meant temporary alliance with the Liberals. For the I.L.P. the question was even more acute. It desired a socialist state "in our time." To bring that about, certain elements in the party eventually came to believe that compromises would have to be made with communism and after 1931 began to work to that end. This problem arose when they found themselves willing to flirt with communist ideas, but unable to accept communist methods. They still wished to keep some connection with the larger labor movement despite their many differences. As a result, they were neither with the communists, nor entirely with the Labor Party. The centrist position was more difficult to maintain than either the Right or Left. The position of the I.L.P. since 1932 has been a doubtful one. The pull of communism has been growing stronger. Whether it can continue to occupy the middle position between communism and the socialism of the Labor Party is a question for time to answer.

